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Turner and the CIA

fight back

Universities move to block covert activities on campus

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By René Becker

WHEN THE Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner invited University President Robben Fleming, along with as yet an undisclosed number of other college presidents, to come to CIA headquarters last June, he had one goal in mind—stop the University from adopting guidelines which would restrict the Agency's covert activities on campus.

The University of Michigan is just one of more than 40 colleges which have either adopted or are considering guidelines that would prohibit government intelligence agencies such as the CIA from using professors, administrators, or anyone else as a covert agent on campus.

The June meeting at the Agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia, which Fleming was unable to attend due to a conflict in his schedule, was the second in a series of three day-long seminars wherein the "common interests" of the CIA and academics were discussed.

It is generally believed the purpose of these seminars is to protect what is perhaps the CIA's most sensitive domestic program—the recruitment of foreign nationals on American college campuses for the Agency's clandestine service.

In a heavily CIA-censored section of the final report to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities, the Agency admitted to "using several hundred American academics (administrators, faculty members, and graduate students engaged in teaching), who in addition to providing leads and sometimes making introductions for intelligence purposes, occasionally write books and other material to be used for propaganda purpose abroad."

The report went on to state that these academics are located on more than 100 American colleges, universities, and related institutes and that generally no one, besides the individuals involved, is aware that a CIA link exists.

Of particular interest to the CIA was, according to the report, obtaining leads on "political foreign intelligent sources, especially those from communist countries." The Committee noted that American academics provide "valuable assistance" in making those contacts.

The Intelligence Committee's report sparked two reactions. In addition to the thousands of requests for personal files under the newly expanded Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the CIA received requests for all files within the Agency indexed under the titles of more than 80 colleges. Also, a number of universities began to discuss adopting guidelines which would prevent the type of covert activities outlined in the Senate report.

The trendsetter in this case was Harvard University. In May, 1977, Harvard became the first American university to adopt guidelines.

As with Harvard, the key to all guidelines, either adopted or considered, is the prohibition of covert recruiting—an activity the University of Michigan Civil Liberties Board has called "a particularly pernicious practice."

The CIA's covert recruitment program came to light through one of those thousands of FOIA requests submitted after the Senate Select Committee hearings.

Gary Weissman was a student at the University of Wisconsin in the late 1950s. He served as president of the Wisconsin Student Association in 1959 and after graduation was mildly active in the anti-Vietnam war movement.

Weissman learned recently that he was the subject of a five-year CIA investigation to determine his eligibility for the Agency's clandestine service. The Agency considered using Weissman as a covert CIA agent at the Seventh World Youth Festival in Vienna in 1959.

The most noteworthy aspect of this investigation is the fact that Weissman never applied for CIA employment and that he was not aware that he was being investigated. Weissman was never contacted by the CIA.

BUT AS THE CIA released more and more documents, the revelations became more and more spectacular. As a result of an FOIA request by Nathan Gardels, a University of California graduate student in political science, the CIA released documents which proved that former UC Vice-President Earl Bolton served a tour of duty with the CIA when he was an administrator at the university system.

The documents revealed that Bolton advised the CIA on student unrest, recruiting UC students, academic cover for professors doing research for the CIA, and improving the Agency's public image on campus.

Despite these revelations, the CIA would not release any evidence which confirmed the much touted theory that the CIA used its campus contacts to recruit foreign nationals for its clandestine service.

The schools with large foreign student enrollments, where it would

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